



Judith Schühle

Medicine, murder of people with albinism in Tanzania – how casino capitalism creates rumorscapes and occult economies

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Schühle, Judith: Medicine murder of people with albinism in Tanzania – how casino capitalism creates rumorscapes and occult economies

CAS Working Paper Series No. 2/2013, Center for Area Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

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ISSN for the whole Working Paper Series: 2192-936X

ISBN for this Working Paper: ....



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## Medicine murder of people with albinism in Tanzania – how casino capitalism creates rumorscapes and occult economies

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### Abstract

In 2007, a spate of killings of people with albinism in Northwest Tanzania placed the country in the international limelight. Rumors that the bones of people with albinism were a necessary ingredient in wealth generating magic potions provoked the killings which had no precedents in Tanzania or the local Sukuma culture. This working paper places the rumors in a wider context of living with albinism in Tanzania as well as a general retreat to magic in the face of economic distress. It is argued that the specific nature of the mining and fishing industries in Northwest Tanzania as examples of casino capitalism brings about 'rumorscapes', in which stories from near and far are exchanged, fused, adapted and, by some 'witchdoctors', turned into viable business options. The rumors and the killings must be understood as a new phenomenon, not as a retreat to traditional *modi operandi* from local Sukuma magic. Only by addressing the uncertainties faced by people working in the fishing and mining industries will it be possible to prevent such murders in the future.

### Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2007 zog Tansania durch eine Serie an Mordfällen an Menschen mit Albinismus in Nordwesttansania internationale Aufmerksamkeit auf sich. Gerüchte, dass die Knochen der Menschen mit Albinismus ein zwingender Bestandteil von magischen Mitteln, die Reichtum versprachen, seien, provozierten diese Morde, die keine Vorläufer in Tansania oder der lokalen Ethnie der Sukuma hatten. Dieses Working Paper erläutert die Entstehung der Gerüchte vor dem Hintergrund, was es bedeutet, in Tansania mit Albinismus zu leben und untersucht sie im Hinblick auf eine häufiger auftretende Tendenz, sich angesichts ökonomischer Unsicherheit auf Magie zu besinnen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Besonderheiten des Bergbaus und des Fischfangs als ‚casino capitalism‘ ein internationales Fluidum an Gerüchten („rumorscape“) entstehen lassen, innerhalb dessen Geschichten von nah und fern ausgetauscht, fusioniert, adaptiert und von einigen ‚witchdoctors‘ zu erträglichen Geschäftsmodellen gemacht werden. Die Gerüchte und Morde müssen als neues Phänomen begriffen werden, nicht als eine Rückbesinnung auf traditionelle *modi operandi* der Magie der lokalen Sukuma. Erst, wenn die Unsicherheiten der Leute, die im Bergbau und Fischfang arbeiten, beseitigt werden, wird es möglich sein, solche Morde in Zukunft zu verhindern.

### About the Author

Judith Schühle, M.A., studied Social and Cultural Anthropology as well as Art History at the Freie Universität Berlin, Uppsala Universitet and Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. After graduating in 2010, she worked as research assistant at the National Museums in Berlin. Since 2013, she is a research fellow at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin within in the DFG funded project 'African Medical Migration: Nigerian Doctors in the USA between Conflicting Priorities of Moral, Economic and Professional Commitment'.